

Guineas and All That

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teeth-baring snarl. Then I bade them a cheery 'Good-morning', and was greeted in turn by a full-throated roar. These preliminaries over, I cast wildly round for something to teach. English! That's what I'll start with; English by the direct method. And heaven knows, never before had a class so unique an opportunity of learning by the direct method; I knew no Shilluk, and it had no English. The setting was perfect. I picked up a book from the table and said 'book'. The boys beamed brightly as though I had performed a smart conjuring trick. I repeated the word and indicated that they were allowed to play too, and was rewarded by a thundered response of 'fool'. I showed them a tin box, saying 'tin'. The answering bellow was 'tin'. 'TABLE' was rendered as 'ALEFUL' (which I wasn't at that hour of the morning). 'RULER—BOO', 'CHAIR—JEER', 'PEN—PEN', 'PENCIL—FANCY'. And so the merry game went on. When I said 'Stand up', the response sounded like a request from a gangster accompanied by a menacing gesture with a Tommy gun.

When at length I had exhausted all the articles in the room, my vocabulary, and myself, I selected the book from the now littered table and asked the brightest looking star in the galaxy what it was. He promptly answered 'Fool'. I tried another boy and he thought it was a 'Fancy'. I wagged the book at a third and he gave his considered opinion that it was a 'Jeer'. 'No, you clown,' I shrieked, 'it's a Book, a BOOK, a BOO—BOOK'. 'Now—to the whole class—what is it?' The troupe, game to the last, bayed something that ranged between 'Fool' and 'Coot'. I threw the book at them and fled.

It is interesting after the lapse of a dozen years to see what became of the 'guinea pigs' of that first 'Essay in Elementary English'. Simon is now a respected and happily married Primary teacher in Detwok Central School; Maurice teaches in Lul Elementary School; Bernard, after serving Detwok mission faithfully for years, inherited a dead relative's wife, and now we see him no more. One boy died and two have dropped out of my ken. Two others took full

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169 advantage of the superiority that the mission education gave them over their fellows, for one became a doctor; not, alas! one of the medical variety, but a witch doctor, and the other, rejoicing in his knowledge of writing and arithmetic, tried to forge a paysheet, and now languishes in Malakal Gaol.

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185 To the Shilluk, the foreigner and all his works were of little or no interest, unless he could see some immediate personal benefit to himself. The missionary was a person whom he hoped to touch for a piastre or a pipeful of tobacco; the mission was a place where those good, but queer, women, [159] the Sisters ('*Tamere*'—an attempt at the Italian '*Sore*'—as he called them), could be relied upon to produce a remedy for his tummyache, a bandage for his sores and a soothing medicine for his rheumy eyes. So, too, education meant nothing to him. The mission school did not mean a place where his children could learn to read and write, but rather a convenient nursery and boarding house where offspring could be dumped during the periods when food was short in the village, and in the rainy season when parents were busy about the all-important business of planting and were only too glad to have their infants out of the way and from under their feet. They knew that in the mission the child would be well fed and housed, would even be given a yard or so of white cloth to wear and a blanket in which to roll himself at night. And when the rains were over and the grain baskets once more full, he could promptly be recalled to the family hearth, to attend to the domestic chores of minding the baby or tending the herd of goats and sheep.

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857 The boys, too, who did condescend to attend the school, were for the most part not particularly worried about their academic advancement. They came because it was a novelty for them; it was a change from the life of the cattle camp and the village; from the milking of cows and the herding of goats and the nursing of squalling babies. They came also because of the amenities the status of a scholar offered to [262] them; the resplendent white cloth with which to cover their